

**SUMMARY OF THE  
NELAC ACCREDITING AUTHORITY REVIEW BOARD MEETING  
JUNE 28, 2000**

The Accrediting Authority Review Board (AARB) of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met at 9 a.m. on June 28, 2000 Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) during the Sixth NELAC Annual Meeting (NELAC 6) in Williamsburg, VA. The meeting was lead by its chair, Mr. George Mills of the Vermont Department of Health, following the agenda distributed to NELAC 6 participants. *The purpose of this meeting was to review the AARB's annual report.*

**AARB REPORT**

Mr. Mills reminded participants that the Board presented its recommendations during the Opening Plenary Session of NELAC 6. This session covered the report in detail and provided an opportunity for participants' comments. Printed copies of the Board's report were available for all participants and have been provided for posting on the NELAC Website. Board members led the review of various sections, taking questions and comments from participants.

In their introduction to their first annual report, the AARB noted that

*On the whole, we believe that the first two years of NELAP operations by EPA have gone remarkably well.*

and that their comments are for improvement of existing processes.

They also noted that the objectives of their efforts focused on the consistency of application of the NELAC standards to assessment of National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) accrediting authorities.

**AARB GENERAL OPERATIONS**

Mr. Mills reviewed the logistics of the Board's first year of operation, noting that its first order of business was to develop and document its own processes. He noted that changes that the Accrediting Authority Committee is proposing for Section 1.6.3 of the NELAC Standard will require additional re-work, if it is to accurately reflect the AARB charter. Particularly important is development of a document control system for AARB documents.

In response to a question about the AARB's role in a laboratory's appeal of an accrediting authority decision, Mr. Mills explained that it is anticipated that the process should begin with contacts with the Accrediting Authority, then the NELAP director, who might refer to a dispute to AARB in limited situations.

Several participants expressed concern that AARB be attentive to relevant International Standards Organization (ISO) guides and standards as they refine their operations to ensure that NELAC/NELAP processes minimize the burden on accredited laboratories. The Board noted that it welcomes assistance in identifying the relevant guides and standards.

## **APPEALS**

Ms. Judy Duncan reviewed the Board's response to an appeal that it received this year, including developing the necessary processes. She reviewed use of the standard operating procedure (SOP) developed for resolving appeals and reported the amicable resolution of this appeal. She also noted that the Board is in the process of refining the process.

One participant asked about the procedure for documenting the Board's processing of the appeal and suggested that the Board add a step for documenting closure to the appeal in order to ensure full traceability.

## **MONITORING NELAP**

Ms. Caroline Madding and Mr. Jack Ruckman described the Board's consistency review of NELAP's accrediting authority recognition process. They discussed the Board's eight findings which all relate to improving and documenting consistency in the recognition process.

In response to a question, it was noted that the Board did not evaluate the adequacy of any NELAC standards, but solely the documentation of standard processes that support consistency of the nationwide process as applied by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Regional assessment teams.

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

AARB Assessment of NELAP Accrediting Authority Recognition Process recommendations:

1. NELAP should develop a SOP or SOPs to be used by Assessment Teams for document preparation and report format for Technical Assessments, Summary Reports, and Final Recommendations regarding recognition of Accrediting Authorities.
2. NELAP should develop a record retention policy and procedure. Include how records can be retrieved and located from the Regions as well.
3. The AARB would like to review the NELAP formal record of decisions with the next review. The final record of decision documentation should be included with the Summary Report Package.
4. NELAP should document that Conflict of Interest issues between the Assessment Team and the Accrediting Authority have been addressed formally.
5. Based on experience, NELAP should suggest timeline changes which will more closely reflect the actual time it will take to assess an Accrediting Authority under the NELAC standards.

**REVOCATION PROCEDURE RECOMMENDATION:**

When an action to revoke an Accrediting Authority's (AA) recognition is being either considered or is imminent it is suggested as a matter of procedure that the NELAP Director send a notice of intent to the AA with a short time (ten working days) to respond and resolve any misunderstandings.

**ACTIONS:**

The Board replaced the term "audit" with "assessment" in its charter.

In its annual elections, the Board selected Mr. Mills as chair, and Ms. Madding as secretary.

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS  
NELAC ACCREDITING AUTHORITY REVIEW BOARD MEETING  
JUNE 28, 2000**

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